



NATIONAL CHURCH ARSON TASK FORCE



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INTERIM REPORT FOR THE PRESIDENT

I. Overview

Over the past **year**, a disturbing series of **arsons** and violent attacks on houses of worship have traumatized the victim congregations and their **communities**, challenged law enforcement **agencies**, and stirred the nation's **conscience**. In response to an outpouring of national concern, President **Clinton** declared the investigation of these fires a top priority of federal law **enforcement**, and **directed** his Administration to implement a three-pronged strategy to (1) **identify** and prosecute the **perpetrators**; (2) rebuild the burned **churches**; and (3) prevent more **fires**.

The report released today shows striking results on **all fronts**:

- The rate of arrest (**33%**) in the church arson cases is double the general arrest rate for **arsons** (**16%**). Federal and state authorities have arrested **143** suspects since January 1, 1995, in connection with **107** fires at churches and other houses of **worship**. Three quarters (**104**) of all defendants arrested in the last two years were arrested since June 1996, when the President established the National Church Arson Task Force (**NCATF** or "**Task Force**") to oversee the investigation and prosecution of incidents of church **arson**. Since January 1, 1995, **48** defendants have been convicted in federal and state prosecutions in connection with fires at **43** houses of **worship**. **Overall**, the **NCATF** has opened investigations of **328** **arsons**, bombings or attempted bombings that have occurred at houses of worship between January 1, 1995, and January 7, 1997.
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (**HUD**) is working closely with the National Council of Churches and the Congress of National Black Churches in the rebuilding **effort**. As a result of this **cooperation**, **10** churches have been rebuilt and **30** churches are undergoing **construction**. HUD is administering a **\$10** million Federal Loan Guarantee Fund to assist with the rebuilding of houses of worship and other non-profit organizations that have been damaged or destroyed by **arson**. This **fund** was established by Congress as part of the 1996 Church Arson Prevention **Act**.
- Arson prevention efforts are now underway across the **nation**. The Department of Justice awarded **\$3** million in grants to counties in **13** states to **intensify** their **enforcement** and surveillance efforts around vulnerable houses of **worship**. The Federal Emergency